

THE CALM IN THE STORM:

Women Leaders in Gulf Coast Recovery

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“All these [trailers] to make it better for you, also make it worse. We’ve got headaches and stomachaches from the formaldehyde smell, condensation inside, and mold on the shoes. There’s no privacy, no getaway. It’s smothering and then there’s fighting among loved ones. You go to sleep and still see the water over your head, children falling from attics or babies up 15 feet on a roof. We’re crying in between and then doing what needs to get done, crying in between and then doing it. They bring the casinos right back in here when people’s minds are not yet strong, so they go to drinking, drugs, or gambling. A woman might take some abuse just to have a place to stay inside. But you cannot judge. If you’ve never been displaced, you won’t understand. I’ve learned not to be quick to judge anybody. Part of healing is telling your story.”

—Sharon Hanshaw, Executive Director, Coastal Women for Change, Biloxi, Mississippi

OVERVIEW

In August and September 2005, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated the Gulf Coast and the lives of more than 1 million people. The scale of the disaster was magnified by longstanding inequalities that placed disproportionate harm and hardship in the path of low-income families, black communities, and female-headed households. One year later, at the forefront of these constituencies stand **women** who have taken up **leadership** for a fair and just recovery, drawing on a history of community-based organizing and the unflinching support of women’s funds across the United States.

The challenges faced by the Gulf region are long-term. Critical policy decisions made now, and over the coming months and years, will also have long-term implications for the type of society we are committed to building. While women play critical leadership roles in their communities, their voices have been largely marginalized in key policy debates. By funding community-based organizations in the Gulf Coast and areas where survivors fled, women’s funds have taken the opportunity to help elevate women’s voices and bring them to the policy table as real partners. This is the only road to just and equitable policies that meet the needs of all people.

With 30 years of experience investing in women’s leadership and integrated social change strategies, women’s funds regularly engage a full cross-section of community groups and social service agencies. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, a longtime supporter of women’s funds, granted the Ms. Foundation for Women in partnership with the Women’s Funding Network \$1.3 million. The Ms. Foundation leveraged the grant into the hands of dozens of community-based first responders, the local women’s groups in the Gulf Coast disaster zone. The Women’s Funding Network allocated significant resources for the support of disaster relief and community building on the ground to local women’s funds: *Atlanta Women’s Foundation, GA; Chicago Foundation for Women, IL; Women’s Fund of Greater Jackson, MS; Women’s Foundation for a Greater Memphis, TN; Women’s Fund of Greater Birmingham, AL.*

In addition to the Kellogg support, these women’s funds raised additional monies to support their relief work. They were joined by other WFN member funds, the *Delta Research and Educational Foundation, Washington, D.C.* and the *Women’s Fund of the 21st Century Foundation, NY* that also allocated resources to relief and rebuilding efforts.

By targeting women, these funds invested in an integrated approach that responds to the reality that **housing, childcare, employment, health, and safety** are inextricably linked, particularly in the aftermath of a disaster. Women’s funds also support **long-term policy change efforts** to change conditions and ensure that women are fully involved in setting policies that affect their communities and regions.

In taking an **integrated approach**, women’s funds and women’s groups recognize, for example, that the cycle of poverty cannot be broken by job opportunity alone – women must also have access to childcare, skills training, self-confidence, and stable health. In a women’s fund, an integrated approach means funding service providers as well as advocacy groups, with a long-term goal of social change. In a women’s group, the integrated approach entails providing services or collaboration on one or more issues as well as taking up leadership and advocacy positions in the



“African-American women are the backbone of any movement in our communities, in the churches, and as individuals doing the work on the ground, often without the titles.”

—Derrick Johnson, President of the Mississippi State Conference on the NAACP

community and at large. As a result of an integrated approach, women’s funds and women’s groups prove adept and informed about a full range of issues and agencies in their community. This makes them responsive and effective in times of disaster, well-versed in local needs, assets, and leadership.

Women’s advocacy efforts since Katrina have characteristically taken an integrated approach across several fronts, such as negotiating for social services at FEMA’s trailer parks, providing safe housing and economic options for women escaping abuse, and collaborating to launch job training programs in construction that are accompanied by childcare services.¹ If these women had been tapped earlier or at higher levels for leadership and advisory roles in the disaster assistance framework, their solutions and strategies could have erased several gaps that plague the rebuilding process today.

THE DISASTER’S IMPACT ON WOMEN

With black residents representing 44 percent of those affected by the storm,² initial media coverage placed a spotlight on race – but afforded little information on the gender dimensions of poverty and recovery on the Gulf Coast. This was nowhere more true than in the city of New Orleans, where 56 percent of families with children were female-headed.³ When the five essentials of housing, childcare, employment, health, and safety were stripped away after Hurricane Katrina, the disaster’s disproportionate impact on women was laid bare:

- Louisiana’s database of sexual assaults recorded 70 attacks during and after the storm, at least 12 at emergency shelters and public sites.⁴
- Louisiana lost 180,000 workers after Hurricane Katrina—103,000 were women (57%).⁵ Female-dominated industries of health, education, and hospitality were especially hard hit.⁶
- In New Orleans after the storm, men’s median annual income rose to \$43,055 while women’s fell to \$28,932.⁷
- Women-headed households occupied 88 percent of public housing units in New Orleans.⁸ Of 8,000 units, more than 5,000 will be razed, and only 1,000 have allowed leaseholders to re-occupy their homes.⁹
- Two-thirds of all single-mother families have not returned to the New Orleans metropolitan area.¹⁰
- Only ten federally-subsidized childcare facilities have re-opened in New Orleans—serving a metropolitan population estimated at 225,000.¹¹
- Pre-Katrina, New Orleans had 114 women for every 100 men. A year later, the level of women has dropped to just 46 percent of the city’s returned-population.¹²

Hurricane Katrina’s devastation was equaled in Mississippi, where the 12-foot storm surge washed away entire cities along the 75-mile coast. Three weeks later, Mississippi bore the brunt of Hurricane Rita as well. Despite this double destruc-



tion, the people of Mississippi have had far less a share of the media's spotlight than New Orleans. Many local residents describe feeling invisible, overlooked by the media and the rest of the country's attention. Still, they persist with grit and determination to speak up for justice and community needs in the rebuilding process. Like Louisiana, the state already had a high percentage of female-headed households living in poverty, and now it is evidenced in the hurricane's disproportionate impact on women:

- The number of families on food stamps jumped from 26,000 to 80,000 in the year since Hurricane Katrina.¹³
- Mississippi's labor force lost 46,000 workers, and women's employment declined 16.6 percent, two points more than men.¹⁴
- Mississippi lost 94 percent of its public housing stock and 45,000 homes.¹⁵ Fifty-one percent of the state's female householders owned their own home, pre-Katrina.¹⁶
- East Biloxi lost 80 percent of its dwellings. Two-thirds of its homeowners had no flood insurance.¹⁷ Low-income women are frequently among the under-insured.
- 38,000 families are living in cramped trailers of just 240 square feet.¹⁸ More than half the mothers and female caregivers among trailer residents show signs of depression or anxiety.¹⁹ Fewer than one in five has sought counseling.²⁰
- East Biloxi has gone without a single low-income childcare program since August 29, 2005.²¹
- Only one of four women's crisis shelters remains open, covering four counties in the disaster area.

The importance of supporting women's solutions, opportunities, and well-being is imperative for a recovery that reverses some of the Gulf Coast's longstanding inequalities and hardships. These were laid bare by the destructive impact of Hurricane Katrina and the gaps in the relief and rebuilding process thus far. Households headed by women, particularly women of color, represent a disproportionate share of displaced families and those underserved by federal disaster assistance programs. Despite bearing enormous personal losses, they have mobilized their own resources for community needs and assumed a seat at the policy table.

CASE STUDY: The **Women's Foundation for a Greater Memphis** was one of several agencies that answered a call from its mayor's office on Sept. 1, 2005, to organize a citywide relief effort. Within 24 hours, the foundation was mobilizing shelters, supplies, temporary housing, meals and a central call center as a response unit for the families fleeing the hurricane's devastation. Executive Director Ruby Bright explains that the Women's Foundation was tapped by the mayor's office "because we have a leadership capacity and a network of social service agencies in Memphis that we've supported, plus the knowledge bank of what resources are out there, what the needs are, and compassion for the situation."

Ruby Bright's task force devised an intake form to document evacuees' immediate needs. The intake form proved so effective that relief organizations in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Arkansas also put it into use. Twenty thousand copies of the form went out to call centers, shelters, Department of Child Services, churches and the Salvation Army. Of the family representatives that filled out the forms, approximately 75 percent were women. Volunteers screened the forms to follow up on immediate needs: locating

family members, filling prescriptions, arranging transportation or medical treatment, even finding employment. The results: the foundation assisted 4,000 displaced families and matched their needs with Memphis resources. Along with the other women in her foundation, Bright extended a hand. Hers went to Paige, one of the Louisiana residents and her nine-year-old daughter Ashley. Within a few weeks, Paige had a job as an administrative assistant, her daughter enrolled in school, a roof over her head, and a car on loan from a foundation board member.

Ten months later, the Women's Foundation re-convened evacuees and city agencies and led a full-day session to identify unmet needs, set goals for new assistance, and pledged a new round of funding.

“The weather, tourism, home-based businesses, and the community culture made New Orleans conducive for getting by. Now people are ready to make a 3-5 year transition plan. Before, it was just a survival plan. They are not living moment by moment, now they are saying: ‘We’re not “evacuees” – we are displaced residents from the Gulf Coast. We want to be a contributing part to making our lives better where we are, and rebuilding back home. Let’s help each other.’”

—Ruby Bright, Executive Director, Women’s Foundation for a Greater Memphis, in Memphis, Tennessee

FIRST RESPONSE: USING A GENDER LENS

Largely ignored by city officials, planners and government structures for decades prior to the storm, post-Katrina women survivors have determined to take matters into their own hands when it comes to resuscitating their devastated communities. Their stories reflect the critical role that community-based leadership plays in any recovery process that aims to be both “just” and “equitable,” while also highlighting the important place women’s funds have occupied in supporting these organizations and uplifting the voices of those who have long been absent from the decision making table.

In cities that absorbed Katrina’s displaced masses, women’s funds tapped their experience at convening and building coalitions by coordinating diverse agencies thrown together in the disaster relief effort. Leadership from women’s funds ensured an understanding of the gender impact where one had otherwise been absent in the disaster assistance framework, and expanded the horizon of support to include a mix of short-term and long-term strategies.

Within the disaster zones of Mississippi and Louisiana, the shelters, agencies, and other non-profit funders reported that women stepped up on behalf of their families during the emergency phase and then became the voice of the community to those in power during rebuilding.²² In the midst of the chaos—displaced staff, lack of power, damaged sites, reports of sexual violence in New Orleans—the Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence (LCADV) set up a central command center in Baton Rouge, and became the communications hub for shelters, employees, and clients attempting to locate each other and find the services they needed. The Red Cross began calling from the Superdome, Convention Center, and other emergency shelters for help to intervene in abusive situations on site. With support from the Ms. Foundation for Women, LCADV put together massive packets of contact cards and pamphlets for Red Cross distribution, and set about shoring up shelters and services across Louisiana.

Using an integrated approach to meet local needs while raising their voices to demand a just and fair recovery, these advocates and many others met with key support from local women’s groups and women’s funds. They have not let up since.

TAKING AN INTEGRATED APPROACH



In every city we reviewed, the most successful approach for families was an **integrated** one that bundled multiple services and agencies through a main contact point or lead agency, and built advocacy efforts through strong coalitions. Women's funds and women's organizations are veterans of these strategies and were well-prepared to respond to Hurricane Katrina's survivors' with holistic thinking about their short- to long-term needs, from emergency relief including re-locating women from destroyed crisis shelters, to supporting women's participation in the political process of rebuilding.

As hundreds of thousands of survivors fled to cities across the United States, women's funds issued rapid-response support for the female-led community efforts already set in motion to provide shelter and services. Many of these efforts built on long experience helping women to secure housing, employment, childcare, health, and safety, and were able to quickly adapt their programs to the needs of displaced families.

In addition to funding grantees in host cities absorbing the displaced, the Ms. Foundation for Women established a *Katrina Women's Response Fund* "to meet the immediate needs of women of color and low-income women in the Gulf Coast and ensure that their leadership and priorities are central in both short and long-term recovery and rebuilding efforts."²³ To deflect the burden from Gulf Coast residents, the Ms. Foundation's own staff canvassed grass-roots initiatives in Mississippi and Louisiana, delivering crucial resources into the hands of local women leading social change.

Similarly, women's funds elsewhere in the United States supported women's leadership by tapping into their local networks of grassroots groups and city agencies to serve the immediate and long-term needs of displaced families from the Gulf Coast. By investing in women's advocacy and organizing for community services, these funds leveraged a wider social benefit on behalf of people of color, low-income residents, and displaced families.

Some examples of **women's policy change** initiatives include:

- **Women of the Storm**, a delegation of 140 Louisianans, and a group that is supported by the **Ms. Foundation for Women**, took blue tarp umbrellas to Capitol Hill in Washington and called for increased support for post-Katrina recovery: raising Louisiana's share of revenue from coastal oil drilling, strengthening levee protection, restoring Gulf coastline and wetlands, and supporting legislation to buy out flood-destroyed homes at 60 percent of their value. The women, a diverse group including civic leaders and activists from New Orleans' Vietnamese community, combined a news conference on the Capitol steps with persistent networking to gain access to key congressional committee members, top aides to President Bush, Laura Bush's chief of staff, as well as sessions with House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi and a top aide to House Speaker Dennis Hastert.²⁴



- Despite a promise of 18 months rent-free, eviction notices began to arrive in Mississippi in April 2006 for 3,000 of the 38,000 families living in FEMA trailers or mobile homes.²⁵ Using a pro bono lawyers' committee, volunteer law students, and a grant from the **Women's Fund of the Community Foundation of Greater Jackson**, the **Mississippi Center for Justice** fought the evictions for trailer residents, public housing occupants, and homeowners facing foreclosure on their mortgages, predominantly serving black female heads of households. Advocacy director Yumeka Rushing personally obtained agreement from the chair of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) to authorize 12 months' deferral on mortgage payments for local homeowners in the disaster area. Finally, when the low-income childcare provider Moore Community House was denied federal disaster assistance, the Mississippi Center for Justice found pro bono lawyers to file an appeal, urging FEMA to expand non-profit eligibility beyond "museums, zoos, and libraries" to include low-income childcare sites.²⁶

- Supported by the **Ms. Foundation for Women**, the **Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence** continues to urge FEMA and the Red Cross to set up national policy and protocols on domestic violence in emergency services and shelter, and to include domestic violence counselors as life-saving emergency personnel. At the state and local levels, LCADV has advocated for an eviction policy that removes abusive partners from FEMA trailers, rather than denying the victim separate housing. According to Executive Director Merni Carter: *"The problem is that there is only one way out of those trailers—there isn't any back door—and FEMA issues one trailer per household, regardless if a woman flees."*

- Encouraged by State Representative Francis Fredericks and their first-ever foundation grant from the **Ms. Foundation for Women**, the **Mississippi NAACP** organized a series of Women of Color Convening's to develop a common policy agenda on housing, *"bringing activist women together with those forced into leadership."* At two-day sessions in Jackson, Gulfport, and one still to come on the Delta, hundreds of women took up joint advocacy positions and reviewed how to introduce a bill to the state's next legislative session in January 2007. They are getting their point across, with 97 percent attendance from the Black Legislative Caucus at their 2006 briefing.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD: MISSISSIPPI

For 20 years a cosmetologist, Sharon Hanshaw is now a grandmother, evacuee, and director of **Coastal Women for Change (CWC)**. After surviving Katrina's total destruction in East Biloxi, an eye infection from mud and mold, and Rita's wrath in Houston, Hanshaw returned to find her home and salon destroyed. Waiting five months for a FEMA trailer, she grew concerned as condo developers and casino owners dominated Biloxi's recovery planning. Hanshaw helped launch Coastal Women for Change in January 2006 to give women a voice for their concerns about the direction and future of their community.

Right away, CWC members sought spots on the mayor's planning commission—and gained five seats on the subcommittees for finance, education, land use, and affordable housing. CWC's sponsored a Biloxi community forum to which they invited the mayor, city council members, and representatives of the city planning department. Mediated by professional facilitators, the forum drew 200 participants with urgent questions about flood elevations, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, housing, and schools. In July 2006, the **NAACP** partnered with Coastal Women for Change on a Women of Color forum in Gulfport, "Assuming Leadership in the Aftermath of Katrina," to identify issues for a legislative agenda. Supporting the NAACP's fair housing bill,

Coastal Women for Change collected 951 signatures on a petition demanding that the Community Development Block Grant ensure distribution of money to low-income and uninsured homeowners and renters.

With a \$30,000 seed grant from the **21st Century Foundation** and additional funds from the **Ms. Foundation for Women**, Coastal Women for Change became a non-profit in May 2006 and started paying Hanshaw a salary. Approximately 25 women meet together, ranging in age from 18 to 80 and representing black residents, Vietnamese women, and local agencies. Collaboration with other Mississippi groups is a cornerstone of CWC's role: the state NAACP has sent Hanshaw to Washington, DC, where she lobbied an elusive Senator Trent Lott to speak with his constituents, **Mississippi Immigrant Rights Alliance (MIRA)** sends immigrant women to participate in CWC meetings, and **Moore Community House** recruited CWC to conduct child-care needs-assessment surveys to help renew its license. In the door-to-door surveys, Coastal Women for Change found women pleading for resumption of childcare on both the East and West side of Biloxi—but also discovered incidences of robbery and abuse of elders living alone in trailers, now fearful to come to the door. Coastal Women for Change alerted the police to increase patrols and surveillance.

As the current hurricane season approaches, Hanshaw herself created a database of emergency contacts and prescriptions, and proposes using public television or Wal-Mart to disseminate the locations of displaced community members, holding a women's healing retreat in Hattiesburg or Gulfport, and promoting financial literacy for people receiving disaster assistance and insurance money. She has spoken out against the physical and mental health hazards of confined trailer housing for so many Mississippians, including herself:

"All these things that make it better for you also make it worse. We've got headaches and stomachaches from the formaldehyde smell, condensation inside, and mold on the shoes. There's no privacy, no getaway. It's smothering and then there's fighting among loved ones. You go to sleep and still see the water over your head, children falling from attics or babies up 15 feet on a roof. We're crying in between and then doing what needs to get done, crying in between and then doing it. They bring the casinos right back in here when people's minds are not yet strong, so they go to drinking, drugs, or gambling. A woman might take some abuse just to have a place to stay inside. But you cannot judge. If you've never been displaced, you won't understand. I've learned not to be quick to judge anybody. Part of healing is telling your story."

"Nearly every single quality of life issue—the environment, social welfare, the economy, children, health—is being pushed by women leaders."

—Reilly Morse, Equal Justice Works Katrina Legal Fellow at the Katrina Recovery Office, Mississippi Center for Justice

While jobless and reacquiring clothes, cars, furnishings, household goods, many displaced women and their families have lost health insurance, depleted their life savings and racked up credit card debt while having to make payments on cars and houses that no longer exist. According to a study of 650 families living in trailers or hotels, at six months after Katrina they had re-located an average of 3.5 times.²⁷

The availability of integrated community services has been fundamental for women to meet the needs of their children and family, elders' health, insurance claims, FEMA red tape, damaged home clean-up or demolition, furnishing a new home, and finding new employment. Women's organizations characteristically offer services on several of these fronts as an integrated approach to support women at the center of their families and communities.

Examples of women-led actions to provide key **community services** include:

- Mississippi lost three domestic violence shelters in Biloxi, Hattiesburg and Laurel to Hurricane Katrina damage, and the remaining shelter in Jackson lost much-needed funding and was about to shut down its legal assistance clinic. Concerned that Jackson's shelter would be overwhelmed with the increased volume of clients and calls, the **Women's Fund of the Community Foundation of Greater Jackson** awarded crucial bridge funding to keep the legal clinic up and running, provide women with representation, *"and to give a voice in rebuilding to those left out of the process."*²⁸ In one instance, an immigrant



woman had been evacuated to Jackson and had no desire to return to her abusive marriage. Linked to the shelter and the legal services, she is now obtaining a divorce, taking English classes and is on her way to becoming an American citizen.

- With a \$20,000 grant from the **Atlanta Women's Foundation** to provide job training to female evacuees, the **Women's Economic Development Agency (WEDA)** connected to a local housing provider and reached out to 200-300 families displaced by Hurricane Katrina. As a result, WEDA has welcomed at least 26 women into its 14-week program of "*business development boot camp*": saving capital, learning business basics, management fundamentals, and producing a business plan. The Katrina clients range in age from 35 to 55 and come from extended evacuee families of up to seven or eight members. Only one quarter of them had owned businesses before Katrina – running home-based enterprises such as childcare, eldercare, housecleaning, consulting, and catering. If executive director Deardra Green-Campbell could have her way, "*Ten percent of our clients' businesses would be non-profit childcare centers for low-income families, providing both a vital service to our clients as well as a job opportunity for them.*"

STORIES FROM THE FIELD: ALABAMA

Shirley Williams lived in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans, a clerical worker in the city courts. Twenty-four hours before Hurricane Katrina's landfall, she packed her car with three grandchildren, her pregnant daughter (age 23), and two sons (17 and 15) and evacuated with them to Mississippi – where the storm caught up with them. When power was restored a week later, an internet café helped her look up a satellite image of her house. For the first time, she saw it was underwater. Shirley enrolled her kids into Mississippi schools, searched for work, and waited a month for FEMA to process her claim. But jobs were scarce. A friend encouraged her to try Alabama for better opportunity, and she never looked back.

The **Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham** had recognized that with 17 hospitals and virtually no unemployment, their city had a strong base to help Katrina evacuees obtain skilled, living wage jobs in the health care industry. Birmingham's biggest drawback was a lack of public transportation, so the city's Unmet Needs Committee was revived and staffed with Case Managers from multiple agencies to bring the services under one roof to the evacuees. With leadership and support from the **Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham**, Alabama, the New Beginnings' Project bundled social services for evacuees through a lead agency, **Jeremiah Hope Skills Center** at St. Vincent Hospital. With their referrals, Shirley got her family moved into a Birmingham hotel, enrolled her kids in new schools, and signed up for a hospital job training program: "*I said to them, 'I'm not here to beg, I've always worked for what I needed. I am a provider and I am independent.'*"

Six weeks later, she emerged with full-time employment and benefits as a Unit Secretary at St. Vincent Hospital, responding to the patients' needs and providing administrative support to the floor nurses and physician's assistants. Her family spent 6-7 months in an apartment, then a house provided by HUD with the option to buy. A Family Guidance program has provided tutoring to her kids, and supplied a coach, management class, and computer training for Shirley: "*I did lose so much, but I gained more. Anyone else that can get into that program or fund that program—for the way it helped me, I am very grateful.*"

Resources provided to 5,000 displaced individuals included transportation vouchers, gas money, carpools, school enrollment, housing referral. The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham provided additional funds that gave evacuees access to marketable skills training, childcare subsidies, support groups, a mentor or a coach, and access to a cash fund for special needs (such as obtaining records, getting a uniform, buying a car battery). One year after Katrina, the Women's Fund's has partnered with the **Southern Alabama Women's Fund** to support a program training 10 Asian women as lay health advisors in the Bayou La Batre region, a crawfish and shrimping zone with many Vietnamese families.



“It was networks of family and faith that brought people here. Not every person on the street would say Chicago is a Southern city, but if you ask a black person like myself, it is.”

—Shelley Davis, Director of Programs, Chicago Foundation for Women

- The **Chicago Foundation for Women** invested their funds into strong local agencies with experience meeting the needs of displaced families through an integrated, woman-focused approach. Launched almost 120 years ago as a housing and resettlement program for freed slaves and World War I refugees, the **Heartland Alliance for Human Needs and Human Rights** in Chicago saw 6,000 Katrina evacuees come through its disaster response program – predominantly led by women. “*Even in two-parent families, if there was a woman, she was taking charge of the situation,*” recalled Charna Epstein, Heartland’s associate director for Katrina recovery. During the first six months, Heartland coordinated with landlords to place evacuee families in available apartments, provided security deposits and first month’s rent, and assisted with furnishings or locating near schools, transportation, or work. For women who had small children or had never worked outside the home, Chicago’s **Interfaith Refugee & Immigrant Ministries (IRIM)** offered a Women’s Empowerment Program, developing self-reliance through Personal Action Plans looking one year ahead. In addition to helping resolve the client’s needs (employable skills, childcare, mentoring, ESL), a caseworker meets weekly with each woman to support her toward her goals. One flight attendant got a job in a Chicago airport, and a former exotic dancer enrolled in hair styling training.

- Supported by the **Ms. Foundation for Women**, the **Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence** also provided emergency funds to re-open four damaged or destroyed women’s shelters and to assist individual clients in the months after Katrina, requiring only a driver’s license or other verification of their ID and risk status. A 30-year old woman in Slidell, Louisiana fled her FEMA trailer and an abusive husband, then hid in an alley where a cab driver noticed that she needed help. She had no purse, so he gave her the number to call LCADV. The Coalition’s Hurricane Relief Fund paid for the cab, her bus ticket to a shelter, and eventually her deposit, first month’s rent and utilities for an apartment on her own in Baton Rouge. The State of Louisiana serves 7,500 women and children in shelter facilities each year, plus 16,300 women and 6,700 children in non-residential programs, a total of 30,600 women and children survivors in the state system receiving support.

- The **Delta Research and Educational Foundation**, the charitable arm of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., provided grants to alumnae leaders in multiple states of the disaster zones for Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The **Domestic Violence Shelter** in Moss Point, Mississippi, received funds to support an additional counselor because of the increase in domestic violence after the storms. **West Biloxi Library** in Biloxi, Mississippi, received funds to replace books and other materials for their summer reading program. In Lake Charles, Louisiana, the **Eljay Foundation for Parkinson’s Syndrome Awareness** was granted funds to assist patients with Parkinson’s Syndrome who were impacted by the hurricanes. The funds provided for needed therapy, adult day care and home sitting services. In Port Arthur, Texas, the **Port Cities Rescue Mission Ministries** received funds to make infrastructure repairs to their damaged facility.

In the Gulf Coast region and the cities where the displaced residents fled, women’s organizations and women’s funds continue to mobilize key interventions that ensure action and advocacy, bringing women and families closer to their goals for housing, employment, childcare, safety, and health – the cruxes of rebuilding and



“My concern for women after Katrina has been the narrowing of the labor pool at a time of total loss of childcare services.”

—Constance Slaughter-Harvey, leader of the Women in the NAACP Committee, assistant attorney general for the state of Mississippi, and in 1970, the first black woman to earn a law degree from the University of Mississippi

recovery. The actions and strategies of Katrina’s female survivors speak of the will and resourcefulness that have long made them the backbone of communities in the Gulf Coast region and the many cities to which the displaced fled.

MOVING FORWARD

Fighting for their families’ way out from Hurricane Katrina, women were the face of survival shouting from flooded rooftops in New Orleans and in front of roofless houses in Mississippi. For weeks afterward, they pursued safety, shelter, and schools for their extended families wherever they fled or returned. Within months, female survivors had opened the doors to city councils, state legislatures, and Washington by mobilizing through groups such as Women of the Storm and the NAACP, demanding a response from lawmakers’ for solutions they had identified as necessary for an effective and just recovery.

What local women and women’s funds have to say about the relief and recovery process provides a “missing link” in the analysis and approaches to relief in the ravaged Gulf region. It also has larger implications for disaster recovery and social change philanthropy in the United States and around the world, with the ongoing reconstruction after Asia’s 2004 tsunami and Kashmir’s 2005 earthquake.²⁹ Local women are not just rebuilding their lives but transforming the injustices that eroded the Gulf Coast long before Hurricane Katrina.

Among the many lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina is this: A natural disaster is an opportunity for a policy approach that actively promotes the well-being of women and supports their solutions. This not only benefits the entire community, it also lifts more families into prosperity than an approach that ignores the assets and roles women bring to recovery and rebuilding.

In doing so, this recovery approach would leverage the benefit to the 5, 10, or 20 people within a woman’s reach instead of just one person at a time, and would ensure that single-mother families do not fall into the gaps of disaster assistance. By supporting women’s leadership and giving them a voice at the policymaking table, by providing social services and programs with an integrated approach, the solutions to poverty and recovery in the Gulf Coast may be in much closer reach. We have an opportunity to get it right, in the coming years after Hurricane Katrina.

We’ve learned that the support of the philanthropic community can play a crucial role in helping affected populations assert democratic control over public resources. When funders come together to support community efforts to push back against government imposed policies, the result can often be a government that acts more responsively to—and responsibly towards—the needs of its constituents. When philanthropy takes on this challenge, everyone wins.

Women’s funds recognized the inequalities in Gulf Coast poverty and politics and were quick to get involved, ensuring that women, especially women of color, gained leadership and decision-making power when their families and communities lost everything else. With this report, we invite the federal, state, and local agencies, funders, and lawmakers to join us in this approach, for the rebuilding of the Gulf Coast that has only just begun.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A FAIR AND JUST RECOVERY

Learned from Women on the Gulf Coast and in Displaced Communities

“Much of the low-income population in any city, not just New Orleans, live in women-headed households. If governments and agencies are going to take a pro-active approach to mitigate fallout from any future disasters, we need to support more women-focused programs designed to enhance family self-sufficiency. We need to do this to make sure that the most vulnerable of our families and communities are stable.”

—Deandra Green-Campbell,
Executive Director, Women’s
Economic Development Agency,
Atlanta, Georgia

At the one-year benchmark, the Women’s Funding Network and the Ms. Foundation for Women present this report as a close-up portrait of the Gulf Coast and displaced survivors’ recovery through the eyes and leadership of local women. They tell us that on the road to rebuilding, Katrina evacuees are only one-quarter of the way there.

As women have taken up leadership for a fair and just recovery from the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, women’s funds have supported their integrated approach to meet community needs and their advocacy positions at a cross-section of issues. By funding women’s voices at the policy table and in community affairs, we have been able to distill a set of key findings and recommendations from their experience and solutions.

1. Take an integrated approach to support women after disasters—and whole families and communities will benefit. As hundreds of thousands of families found themselves displaced from their homes, women were at the center of most households’ emergency management. The most effective and survivor-oriented model for meeting short-term needs was one that collected multiple agencies and services under one roof and targeted those services to the women in the families. This manner of ‘one-stop shopping’ enabled women to manage their families’ primary needs (shelter, relocation, medical, financial, psychological) more efficiently without having to arrange further transportation or childcare. In Chicago, the city has replicated the model of integrated relief services six times since Hurricane Katrina, to serve other people in transition such as inmates leaving prison, abused women leaving shelters, the homeless seeking livelihoods, people with disabilities starting independent living, and single mothers moving from welfare to work. As the weeks stretched into months after Hurricane Katrina, women’s groups, women’s funds, and refugee resettlement organizations used an integrated approach to continue serving unmet needs into the long-term:

- placing women community leaders in positions to assemble, assess, and advise disaster relief and recovery policies
- creating economic empowerment and temporary housing options for women evacuees fleeing a trailer shared with an abusive partner, in addition to providing comprehensive legal, medical, and psychological services
- embedding mental health support into training and assistance programs for mothers, female caregivers, and community leaders on whom survivors rely for their emotional and physical wellbeing

Wider use of the integrated model not only benefits women and communities but also builds a city's preparedness to respond to future disasters.

2. Re-establish childcare as quickly as schools are re-opened, so that single mothers and parents with children under age six are free for work and recovery demands. There were 12,000 preschool-age children living in female-headed households within Katrina's disaster zone, and after one year, the residents of East Biloxi, Mississippi, are still without a single subsidized childcare facility. FEMA's guidelines for nonprofit organizations exclude federally-funded childcare sites from eligibility for disaster assistance – but include museums and zoos. Childcare is an essential service to restore, through disaster assistance and interim licenses. Childcare is also a necessity for parents attending in-person claims appointments and mandatory inspections of damaged property. Additionally, a public-private partnership or incentive for corporations to open or expand their own on-site childcare would free spaces in public childcare facilities.



3. Restore and revitalize public and affordable housing to serve female-headed, low-income families. Female-headed families represented 88% of the public housing residents in New Orleans. More than half of the city's public housing units are being razed, while average market rates have doubled in Louisiana and Mississippi to more than \$1000 per month to rent a 2-bedroom house or apartment. Many families headed by women are still in transition from temporary to permanent housing after Hurricane Katrina, making the affordability and availability of fair and public housing imperative. Nevertheless, HUD waived Congress' requirement that Mississippi spend 50% of its federal block grant on low- to moderate-income housing, and Governor Haley Barbour vetoed state legislation supported by the NAACP to track distribution of the funds according to race, gender, income, and ZIP code. Another route for accountability is to require developers to set aside 20% of their project for affordable housing, or contribute its equivalent amount into a public housing trust.

4. Offer enterprise development, capital, and training for women to enter fields with increased demand: construction, health, education, eldercare, and childcare industries. Women workers were more likely than men to lose their employment or businesses after Hurricane Katrina – and with that, their health insurance. Of the 180,000 jobs lost in Louisiana, 103,000 belonged to women. In the region's pre-Katrina workforce, women had represented the vast majority of nurses, teachers, sales, and office workers. As a result of storm damage, the health, education, and hospitality industries took the hardest hit—as did their female employees and entrepreneurs. Women from the Gulf Coast are going to need better-paying jobs and new opportunities to get back on their feet and restore their family's wellbeing and the region's economy to what they once were.

5. Increase and improve mental health services and gender violence intervention programs in the immediate, medium-term, and long-term recovery phases. Distress and turmoil during a natural disaster will feed pre-existing abusive behavior, and domestic violence counselors should be dispatched to Red Cross shelters as regular personnel. Louisiana agencies carefully tracked and recorded 70 sexual assaults that occurred in the days following Hurricane Katrina; at least 12 took place at emergency shelters. In the ensuing year, media noted a marked rise in suicides among evacuees – without commenting that several were committed by men after murdering a female partner. One survey of evacuees found that 60% reported

“It’s important for workers of all colors to understand that the immigrant rights issue is a working class issue, an issue that all poor people who have been marginalized should be concerned about.”

—Jaribu Hill, Mississippi
Immigrant Rights Alliance and the
Mississippi Workers Center for
Human Rights

feelings of depression, while in another more than half the mothers and female caregivers exhibited evidence of depression or anxiety disorders. Increased training and support of women’s community-based counseling resources and crisis services will make mental health and safety more sustainable after a disaster, in turn amplifying emotional and physical security for those in their care.

In short, services and policy-making decisions that put women at their center leverage a multiplier effect in communities and families, which helps restore power and stability to those who lose everything else in a disaster.

APPENDIX OF ALL ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS INTERVIEWED:

Virginia Sweet, Director
The Women’s Fund of Greater Birmingham
Birmingham, AL
www.thewomensfundbham.org/

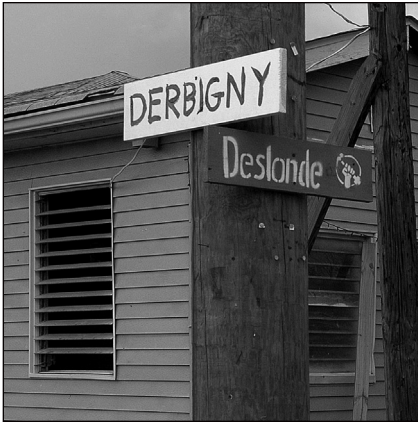
Amy Zuccherro, Membership Manager
Women’s Funding Network
San Francisco, CA
www.wfnnet.org

Deardra Green-Campbell, Executive Director
Women’s Economic Development Agency
Atlanta, GA
www.weda-atlanta.org/

Charna Epstein, Associate Director for Katrina Recovery
Jessica Weisbach, Case Manager
Heartland Alliance for Human Needs and Human Rights
Chicago, IL
www.heartlandalliance.org

Shelley Davis, Program Director
Chicago Foundation for Women
Chicago, IL
www.cfw.org

Soudary Kittivong-Greenbaum, Women’s Empowerment Program Director
Greg Wangerin, Executive Director
Interfaith Refugee and Immigration Ministries
Chicago, IL
www.irim.org



“I said to them, ‘I’m not here to beg, I’ve always worked for what I needed. I am a provider and I am independent.’”

—Shirley Williams, former resident of Lower Ninth Ward, New Orleans, now living in Birmingham, Alabama

Tanya Harris
Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN)
New Orleans, LA
www.acorn.org/index.php?id=8219

Merni Carter, Executive Director
Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Baton Rouge, LA
www.lcadv.org/index.htm

Sharon Hanshaw, Executive Director
Coastal Women for Change
Biloxi, MS
www.cwcbiloxi.org

Carol Burnett, Executive Director
Moore Community House
Mississippi Low-Income Child Care Initiative
Biloxi, MS
www.mschildcare.org

Yamika Rushing, Advocacy Director
Reilly Morse, Legal Fellow, Katrina Recovery Office (Biloxi)
Mississippi Center for Justice
Jackson, MS
www.mscenterforjustice.org/begin.html

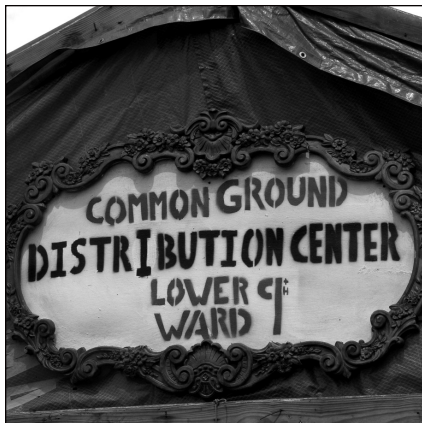
Constance Slaughter-Harvey, Women in NAACP Committee
Derrick Johnson, President of the NAACP Mississippi State Conference
Mississippi State Conference, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
Jackson, MS
www.naacp.org/community/#mississippi

Jaribu Hill, Executive Director
Mississippi Workers Center for Human Rights in the Delta
Greenville, MS
www.msworkerscenter.org/index.htm

Ellen Collins, Director of Programs
The Women’s Fund, Community Foundation of Greater Jackson
Jackson, MS
www.cfgreaterjackson.org/page18.html

Julia Beatty, Program Officer
Ms. Foundation for Women
New York, NY
www.ms.foundation.org

Ruby Bright, Executive Director
Women’s Foundation for a Greater Memphis
Memphis, TN
www.wfgm.org



*“It takes more than a year
to rebuild after losing what
you worked your entire life
to attain.”*

—Mildred Alcorn, former
resident of Lower Ninth Ward,
New Orleans, who now leads
Displaced Citizens of the Gulf
Coast in Memphis, Tennessee

Other contributions by:

Atlanta Women's Foundation, www.atlantawomen.org

Delta Research and Educational Foundation, www.deltafoundation.net

Gender and Disaster Network, www.gdnonline.org/

Global Fund for Women, www.globalfundforwomen.org

Katrina Information Network, www.katrinaaction.org

Institute for Women's Policy Research, www.iwpr.org

Women's Fund of the 21st Century Foundation, www.21cf.org

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“My 15 year-old seemed to have it hit him the hardest. I tried to shield them from seeing what I had to see. It helped to keep them busy with activities at the hotel and things to do: going to church, singing in a choir. If you don’t have them doing anything, they start seeing everything on television, and now they say, ‘We didn’t realize how bad it was. But now we know we got out with our life.’” I think it starts with me: If I break down, they’re gonna break down. So I haven’t thought too much about what happened back there in New Orleans because I can’t break down. I have to keep going, because of my children.”

—Shirley Williams, former resident of Lower Ninth Ward, New Orleans, now living in Birmingham, Alabama

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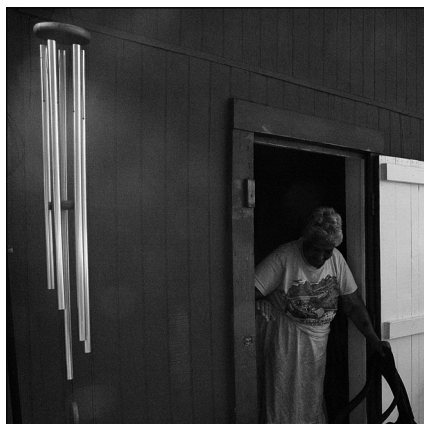
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FOOTNOTES



¹ See: Renaissance Village Trailer Park Advisory Council, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence Hurricane Relief Fund, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Moore Community House, Biloxi, Mississippi, with Wider Opportunities for Women.

² Congressional Research Service, "Hurricane Katrina: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Impacted Areas," November 4, 2005, p 21.

³ American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2004. Median annual income was just \$16,450.

⁴ Louisiana Foundation Against Sexual Assault reported in Women's eNews, "Assault Risk Rises in Jammed Post-Katrina Homes," June 22, 2006

⁵ The Opportunity Agenda, "Jobs and Business: The State of Opportunity for Workers Restoring the Gulf," 2006; also, Brookings Institution, "Katrina Index: Tracking Variables of Post-Katrina Recovery," August 8, 2006, p 51.

⁶ Institute for Women's Policy Research, "The Women of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast: Multiple Disadvantages and Key Assets for Recovery," October 2005.

⁷ *ibid*, Part II, August 2006. Citation: American Community Survey 2006.

⁸ Associated Press, "New Orleans Housing Unwelcoming to Some" by M. Williams, July 21, 2006

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¹⁰ American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2006. Institute for Women's Policy Research.

¹¹ Brookings Institution, "Katrina Index: Tracking Variables of Post-Katrina Recovery," August 8, 2006, p 61.

¹² City of New Orleans, "Rapid Population Estimate Report," January 2006, p 5.

¹³ American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2006. Institute for Women's Policy Research.

¹⁴ Brookings Institution, "Katrina Index: Tracking Variables of Post-Katrina Recovery," August 8, 2006, p 9; American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2006. Institute for Women's Policy Research

¹⁵ Mississippi Development Authority Public Housing Program, "CDBG Disaster Recovery Action Plan." Also: Mississippi Commission for Recovery, Rebuilding, and Renewal

¹⁶ American Community Survey 2004, US Census Bureau

¹⁷ Biloxi Relief, Recovery, and Revitalization Center, "East Biloxi Community Restoration Initiative: Community Plan," 2006

¹⁸ New York Times, "Evacuees Find Housing Grants Will End Soon," April 27, 2006

¹⁹ Louisiana Child & Family Health Study, Columbia University, "On the Edge – Children and Families Displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita Face a Looming Medical and Mental Health Crisis," April 2006

²⁰ New York Times, "A Legacy of the Storm: Depression and Suicide," June 21, 2006

²¹ Phone interview with Carol Burnett, Mississippi Low-Income Child Care Initiative, August 2006

²² From telephone interviews with Ellen Collins, Women's Fund of Greater Jackson; Derrick Johnson, Mississippi NAACP; Reilly Morse, Mississippi Center for Justice; Charna Epstein, Heartland Alliance for Human Rights and Human Needs (Chicago); Ruby Bright, Women's Foundation for a Greater Memphis, July and August 2006.

²³ <http://www.ms.foundation.org/>

²⁴ New Orleans' Times-Picayune, also USA Today, "Louisiana Women Storm Washington," January 31, 2006

²⁵ New York Times, "Evacuees Find Housing Grants Will End Soon," April 27, 2006

²⁶ <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/disasterrecovery/info/resourcesdisaster.htm>

²⁷ Louisiana Child & Family Health Study, Columbia University, "On the Edge – Children and Families Displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita Face a Looming Medical and Mental Health Crisis," April 2006

²⁸ Phone interview with Ellen Collins, Women's Fund of the Community Foundation of Greater Jackson, August 2006

²⁹ Global Fund for Women, "Caught in the Storm: The Impact of Natural Disasters on Women," December 2005



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